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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [AJ](#)  
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN'S NK UNGA RESOLUTION UNDERSCORES  
DISTRUST OF MINSK GROUP PROCESS

REF: A. BAKU 00238

- [1](#)B. BAKU 00246
- [1](#)C. BAKU 01496
- [1](#)D. BAKU 00129
- [1](#)E. BAKU 00003
- [1](#)F. BRYZA/CARPENTER EMAIL OF 3/15/08

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The March 14 UNGA vote on Azerbaijan's "Situation in the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan" resolution reflects the GOAJ's broader attempt to underscore Azerbaijan's fundamental redlines in the Minsk Group negotiations and to find additional tools outside of the Minsk Group to advance its position on NK. The GOAJ and the general public increasingly perceive that the Minsk Group is unable or unwilling to impose or facilitate a solution to the conflict that is in keeping with Azerbaijan's fundamental interests. The longer-term skepticism about the Minsk Group -- combined with the more immediate drivers of specific GOAJ concerns with the Basic Principles document from November 2007, Baku's nervousness over Kosovo's independence, and Deputy Foreign Minister and the GOAJ's defacto Special Envoy on NK, Araz Azimov's personally investing himself in the resolution -- drove the Azerbaijani decision to move the resolution forward.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary (continued): While the perception that the U.S. or other Minsk Group Co-Chairs can impose a settlement on the parties to the conflict is incorrect, the perception is firmly embedded in the mind of the general public, and increasingly apparent among a range of GOAJ contacts. This perception was reinforced by Kosovo's independence. The three GOAJ officials who control NK policy -- President Aliyev, Foreign Minister Mammadyarov, and Azimov -- believe that the Co-Chairs, at a minimum, should bring more pressure to bear on Armenia in the talks. The degree to which these views will shape the GOAJ's approach toward the Minsk Group negotiations and the broader bilateral relationship should not be discounted. We will need to counter the underlying perception that "the U.S. could more if it wanted to" to avoid spillover to our broader relationship and interests while convincing the GOAJ that unavoidable compromises will be necessary for a negotiation solution. End Summary.

## Mixed GOAJ Response

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13. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Azimov has taken the lead in staking out the GOAJ's public reaction to Azerbaijan's UNGA resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), portraying it as a diplomatic success, while criticizing those that voted against the resolution. Azimov stated that the "important" document has "legal and political force." Azimov also threw several jabs at the Minsk Group, characterizing the UNGA resolution as a "serious warning" to the co-chair countries. In March 15 remarks that received extensive press coverage, Azimov said the GOAJ "will revise and adjust its relations with the co-chairing countries within the framework of the Minsk process." Retreating somewhat from his private threats to eschew the Minsk Group (refs a and b), Azimov remarked, "Having established a monopoly on the resolution of the conflict within the framework of the Minsk Group, the Co-Chairs perhaps feel very comfortable. We will certainly continue working with the Co-Chairs, but our work with them should be changed fundamentally." Azimov also speculated publicly that other countries, such as Turkey or Germany, should play a greater role in the Minsk Group process. According to the German Ambassador, the Azerbaijanis had approached Berlin in the past year to determine Germany's willingness to join the Minsk Group. Berlin had responded negatively.

14. (C) Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Novruz Mammadov's public statement appeared to be more tempered than Azimov's, noting that the resolution "has an important political and legal significance," while calling on the Co-Chairs "to clarify their positions" regarding Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Novruz told Pol/Econ Chief on March 18 that the

GOAJ's official reaction to the UNGA vote was "not yet clear" and hinted that Azimov may have been operating without instructions when he publicly criticized the Co-Chairs' vote.

Mammadov said he was worried by Azimov's "strong" reaction and felt a more moderate GOAJ response was needed. Mammadov noted that Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov was still traveling outside of Azerbaijan and had not yet discussed the UNGA vote with President Aliyev to his knowledge. Mammadov expects that the GOAJ will not have a full, public reaction to the vote until after the March 20-28 Novruz holiday. Mammadov reiterated several times that the Co-Chairs' vote would not change the nature or direction of Azerbaijan's relationship with the United States.

## Public Lauds Resolution, Questions U.S. Role

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15. (C) In general, the Azerbaijani public perceives the passage of the UNGA resolution as a victory for Azerbaijani diplomacy, albeit a muted success that is clouded with questions. Some segments of the general public also perceive the U.S. vote against the resolution as a lack of support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Fuad Aliyev, a young civil society activist, told us that for the ordinary Azerbaijani, who gets most of his/her news from television or radio, the passage of the UNGA resolution is a wholly positive development because it lends enhanced international legitimacy to Azerbaijan's position. Aliyev said that while the general public is negatively predisposed to the Minsk Group co-chair countries' "no" vote, the public's focus primarily is on the fact that Azerbaijan was able to pass the UNGA resolution. Tabib Huseynov, the director of the International Crisis Group in Azerbaijan and an IDP, told us there is a strong negative ripple moving through the general public, which is interpreting the U.S.' voting position as a rejection of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. (NOTE: The Embassy is posting the U.S. Explanation of Vote on its website and has used it in public statements to counter the popular perception.) On the other hand, Ilgar Mammadov, a political commentator, told us that were postings on several popular blogs arguing that at least the U.S. did not actively seek to convince other countries to vote against the

resolution.

¶6. (C) Irada Bagirova, a local academic and the former Azerbaijan OSI office director, told us the educated members of Azerbaijani society support the resolution on grounds of patriotism. At the same time, Bagirova said some of the intelligentsia have lingering questions about the closed door negotiations between the GOAJ and the Minsk Group Co-Chair countries, specifically why the Co-Chairs refused to support the UNGA resolution and why the GOAJ was not able to convince these states to support the resolution.

#### Local Press Hammers the Minsk Group

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¶7. (SBU) Unsurprisingly, local media reaction to the Minsk Group's voting position was unanimously negative. All media outlets -- regardless of their political affiliation -- condemned the Co-Chair countries, vote, generally following the line from one newspaper that the Co-Chair countries' vote was as "an explicit display of their biased, anti-Azerbaijani, pro-Armenian position in the NK conflict resolution." Media reports reflected inflamed public debates about the possibility of having the Minsk Group dissolved with its mediator mission canceled. These debates were reinforced by the GOAJ officials, statements (Azimov and Novruz Mammadov) that Azerbaijan will reconsider its relations with those who voted against Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.

¶8. (SBU) Influential ZERKALO headlined its front-page article "The Co-Chairs Made a Gross Mistake," referring to Azerbaijani Ambassador to the UN A.Mehdiyev, who questioned "how one can continue to work with them after that?" Pro-government YENI AZERBAIJAN newspaper carried a headline "Azerbaijan's Diplomacy Exposes the Real Faces of The Co-Chairs." Independent EKSPRESS's headline was "The

Co-Chairs, 'Arguments' Not Convincing." MARKAZ newspaper carried an over-the-folder photo with caption "Minsk Group Should Be Dissolved!" Opposition BIZIM YOL, headline read "Minsk Group Justifies Its Pro-Armenian Position." BAKI KHABAR daily suggested that the Co-Chairing countries should be "faced with cold relations with Azerbaijan for their destructive role in the conflict resolution."

#### What Drove the UNGA Resolution?

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¶9. (C) When pressed to explain the GOAJ's decision to pursue the UNGA resolution, Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Novruz Mammadov admitted that he had no idea what the GOAJ hoped to achieve by this resolution. All decisions regarding NK policy, he said, are made by President Aliyev, Foreign Minister Mammadyarov, and Deputy Foreign Minister Azimov. Mammadov said that the UNGA resolution was the personal initiative of Foreign Minister Mammadyarov; he was confident that Mammadyarov would not have pursued the resolution if he thought the U.S. would vote no. Mammadov speculated that Mammadyarov may have pursued the resolution out of a growing sense that the Minsk Group was not delivering results, and to increase pressure on Armenia.

¶10. (C) In our view, a mix of short and long-term factors prompted the GOAJ to pursue the UNGA resolution. As Mammadov noted, there is growing sense among both senior GOAJ officials and the broader public that the Minsk Group is unwilling or unable to bring about a solution to the conflict that will address Azerbaijan's fundamental interests. The GOAJ, over the past few years, has been accelerating its efforts in other fora, including the UN, to advance its position on the conflict. This sense of frustration with the Minsk Group process has been reinforced by GOAJ unhappiness with changes to the Basic Principles of November 2007. More immediately, the GOAJ has felt an urgent need to stake out and gain international support for its view that Kosovo's independence should not set a precedent for resolution of the NK conflict.

## Growing Frustration with the Minsk Group

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¶11. (C) Respected local commentator Rasim Musabayov attributed the key long-term factor behind the UNGA resolution to the GOAJ's determination that the Minsk Group is unwilling or unable to bring about a solution to the conflict that meets Azerbaijan's basic redlines; and, that the GOAJ therefore needs to develop other tools outside the Minsk Group to advance its position. Musabayov noted that the UNGA resolution was one such tool because it lends international legitimacy to Azerbaijan's position, which the GOAJ certainly would use as a baseline within and outside the Minsk Group.

¶12. (C) Over the past several years, and given rapidly increasing capabilities through its new oil wealth, the GOAJ has expanded its outreach to a variety of countries to garner support for its position on NK. A central goal of this outreach is to gain votes in multilateral fora that will lend enhanced international legitimacy for Azerbaijan's NK position and to develop bilateral relations which will hopefully translate into political and public support on NK. While MFA lacks capacity in a host of areas, DFM Araz Azimov's staff appears to keep a meticulous tally of vote-swapping agreements Azerbaijan has with other states. For example, when the Embassy requests Baku's support on a variety of policy demarches -- ranging from supporting the U.S. position at the UN to backing a U.S. candidate at a multilateral organization -- the MFA quickly tells us that DFM Azimov's office will examine the issue. This GOAJ outreach to other states is not new, but it has rapidly been picking up steam in the past several years as Azerbaijan has begun to feel stronger, economically and politically. There has been a dizzying stream of senior foreign government officials visiting Baku accompanied by an equally dizzying schedule of foreign travel by President Aliyev and Foreign Minister Mammadyarov. The GOAJ's failure to gain support from

key OIC and NAM members on the UNGA resolution likely led to some of Azimov's personal pique over the vote. As Novruz Mammadov studied a carefully highlighted and annotated vote record, he commented that the 100 abstentions were directly related to the U.S. position. "These countries would have voted yes if the U.S. had abstained," he sadly noted.

## And with the Basic Principles

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¶13. (C) The GOAJ's frustration with the Minsk Group process is reinforced by its lingering discomfort with elements of the Basic Principles document, which the Co-Chairs provided to Azerbaijan and Armenia prior to the OSCE Ministerial in November 2007. Both Azimov and President Aliyev expressed similar explicit concerns with the document in the past several months, suggesting a consensus of concern among the most important GOAJ policymakers on this issue. In separate March meetings with the Ambassador and DCM (refs a and b), Azimov cited alleged "drastic changes" in the Basic Principles document. In both meetings, Azimov cited GOAJ concerns with the document's failure to provide assurances on the right of return, Kelbajar, and the Lachin corridor. International Crisis Group in Azerbaijan Director Huseynov speculated that the resolution may have been a deliberate attempt by the GOAJ to move away from the Basic Principles. The Embassy judges that Huseynov may be right, given President Aliyev and DFM Azimov's stated concerns with the Basic Principles document.

¶14. (C) While Azimov appears to have the maneuvering room to confidently stake out maximalist positions -- in part because he is the senior GOAJ official who has worked the longest on this issue and is the most personally attached to his positions -- President Aliyev also told the Ambassador on December 14 that while the November 2007 Basic Principles paper in general is good, "some elements of the paper are not among those agreed, and this creates serious concern (ref

c)." In particular, the language with respect to Kelbajar states that the five year period can be extended. It was previously agreed that there would be no extension of the five year period -- an extension was never agreed by Azerbaijan, Aliyev repeated. Is this "a mistake, or is it a trick," he wondered aloud. "Certain words are new and they can change the substance" of the text on the issue. Similarly, on the issue of the Lachin corridor, the words are different than those discussed. While the words are actually better, the substance on this issue "remains the same -- we need the substance improved." While Azimov is more given to hyperbole than Aliyev when it comes to NK, both expressed a clear concern with key points in the document.

#### Kosovo Cannot Be a Precedent for NK

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¶15. (C) In the context of the GOAJ's concerns with the Basic Principles document, Kosovo's independence was the immediate trigger behind the GOAJ's decision to push the UNGA resolution forward. President Aliyev, Mammadyarov, and Azimov have all expressed concern that Kosovo's independence sets a dangerous precedent for NK. Foreign Minister Mammadyarov told the Ambassador on February 12 he was considering "steps" at the UN to delink Kosovo from NK (ref d), including an UNGA resolution completely different from the long-planned GUAM resolution on frozen conflicts. Azimov told the Ambassador on March 12 that the GOAJ became "nervous" after Kosovo's independence and the U.S. argumentation supporting the application of UNSCR 1244 as it applied to Serbia's territorial integrity (ref a). Azimov repeatedly expressed concern that Kosovo gives the perception of a precedent and the U.S. argumentation regarding UNSCR 1244 demonstrated that the U.S. support for a state's territorial integrity is not unconditional. Mammadyarov and Azimov both have made it clear that their concerns are driven primarily by Azerbaijani domestic considerations, as they must show the Azerbaijani people that they are doing something to react to the "Kosovo model."

#### The Personal Factor?

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¶16. (C) As we argued in refs a and b, personality also likely figured into the GOAJ's push for this resolution. Specifically, Azimov told the Ambassador he was "behind" the resolution and indicated some concern about whether he would still hold his position if the resolution flopped. Given the very small number of GOAJ officials that directly make NK policy, Azimov very likely proposed the resolution to Mammadyarov, who in turn forwarded the MFA's positive recommendation to President Aliyev. Azimov affirmed that President Aliyev himself had given instructions to move forward with the vote in the UN. In a culture that emphasizes face-saving and prestige, it would have been hard for Azimov or Mammadyarov to reverse themselves and advise President Aliyev to back off the resolution.

#### Who Controls Azerbaijan's NK Policy?

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¶17. (C) The circle of GOAJ officials making and influencing Azerbaijan's NK position is extremely small. Local contacts report that the key players are President Aliyev, Foreign Minister Mammadyarov, and Deputy Foreign Minister Azimov; Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Mammadov confirmed this in a March 18 meeting. Minister of Defense Safar Abiyev plays a role in maintaining deterrence along the Line of Contact, sounding the bellicose line of Azerbaijan's growing military strength, and providing estimates on the balance of forces. While he has been an increasingly open and caustic critic of the Minsk Group, publicly and privately, he does not appear to play a significant role in the NK policymaking/negotiating process. Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Novruz Mammadov freely admits that he is a sideline spectator to the GOAJ's NK policy deliberations, but he may play some role in fomenting dissent to the Prague



Process as he has alluded to sharp differences within the GOAJ over the GOAJ's engagement in the Basic Principles exercise, and he has bitterly criticized Mammadyarov on a number of occasions for what he believes to be fundamental missteps in the peace process. On March 18, for example, Mammadov argued that Azerbaijan should lessen its focus on NK's status and push toward agreement on the immediate liberation of the seven occupied territories.

#### Implications for the GOAJ's Minsk Group Policy

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¶18. (C) We believe the Minsk Group process will likely weather this storm because the GOAJ has too much to lose by abandoning the process at this time. Discarding the process would risk weakening U.S. involvement and Azerbaijan would also be in the position of trying to explain why it abandoned the diplomatic track. The atmospherics of Foreign Minister Mammadyarov's March 15 meeting with Ambassador Kasprzyk and the co-chair representatives in Paris reported in ref f also suggest the GOAJ is not prepared to abandon the current Minsk Group format. Azimov's more heated response to the U.S. voting decision in large measure reflects his concerns that his personal reputation is on the line.

¶19. (C) While the GOAJ likely is not seriously considering altering the current Minsk Group format, the impact of the fallout over the UNGA resolution and the broader dissatisfaction with the entire Minsk Group process should not be minimized. Reflecting a widely-held sentiment, which we hear often from a range of contacts, respected political commentator Rasim Musabayov told us the Minsk Group has "no credibility" among the general public. Musabayov also said that while the GOAJ knows that it cannot abandon the Minsk Group, it also has little hope that the Minsk Group can solve the problem in line with Azerbaijan's interests. International Crisis Center in Azerbaijan Director Huseynov predicted that at least in the short-term, the GOAJ increasingly will feel insecure within the Minsk Group process, which likely will produce a more defensive and inflexible mood from Baku. Ilgar Mammadov judged that the Kosovo precedent and the UNGA vote will push the GOAJ to take a "much harder" line on NK. We agree.

¶20. (C) There is a widening belief within the GOAJ and the general public that the Minsk Group -- and notably, the U.S. -- is unwilling to force a resolution of the problem, by increasing pressure on Armenian to be more flexible and/or to "impose" a solution meeting Azerbaijan's demands. The UNGA resolution was a shot across the bow, underscoring this belief and Azerbaijan's insistence that the co-chairs take greater account of Azerbaijan's fundamental redlines in the negotiations. There is also a widening consensus in the GOAJ and the general public that Azerbaijan gives more than it gets in its bilateral relationship with the U.S., especially on its most critical domestic and foreign policy interest. GOAJ contacts have noted that the "bargain" President Heydar Aliyev thought he had struck with the West -- energy cooperation and western orientation in exchange for help on NK -- has proved unproductive. The public perception of the U.S. vote against the UNGA resolution reinforces this sentiment. While rooted in the mistaken belief that the U.S. or other Minsk Group members can impose a settlement on the parties, the perception is real and firmly embedded in the mind of the general public. The GOAJ harbors a more nuanced view that the Co-Chairs, and particularly the U.S., could and should apply more pressure on Armenia to bring about a solution acceptable to Azerbaijan. The degree to which these views will shape the GOAJ's future interactions with the Minsk Group, and the impact of more difficult engagement on NK on the broader bilateral relationship, should not be discounted.

#### What Does this Mean for the Future?

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¶21. (C) We believe that the GOAJ strategy for resolving the

NK conflict rests on the assumption that Azerbaijan has the need and a new ability, as a wealthier and more powerful state, to develop additional tools outside of the Minsk Group process to advance its position and influence that process. The failure to garner broader UNGA support may induce some reflection and forestall precipitate moves on the Minsk Group. Nonetheless, as we have reported reftels, the GOAJ will increasingly seek to use political, diplomatic, and economic instruments of state power to exert more pressure on the negotiating process for a resolution in line with Azerbaijan's fundamental interests. We can expect to see more active efforts in other international fora, despite the only partial success of Azerbaijan's UNGA effort. We will need to work to counter the widely held perception that "the US could do more if it wanted to," and widening skepticism about the Minsk Group process and the U.S. role in it, to avoid spillover to our broader relationship and interests while convincing the GOAJ that unavoidable compromises will be necessary for a negotiated solution.

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